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ABSTRACT

DreamWeavers listen for the dreams within themselves and within others. The process of career counseling, career management coaching and career/life planning invites practitioners to consistently listen for the dreams, understand that dreams are visions and that visions guide us to action. This paper highlights how career practitioners are called upon to take on the role of Dream Catchers as they help people deal with the reality of life, the turbulent times, and/or the economic situations that often drive the job search. (GCP)

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# Beyond DreamWeaving:
# Honoring Our Connections

by

Martha M. Russell

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# Beyond DreamWeaving: Honoring Our Connections

Martha M. Russell

## Introduction

DreamWeavers listen for the dreams within themselves and within others. The process of career counseling, career management coaching and career/life planning invites us to consistently listen for the dreams, understand that dreams are visions and that visions guide us to action. This process asks us to identify the qualities of the visionary in each of us and to recognize them in each other. Importantly it allows us to connect the threads that can be woven together so that dreams can become realities. Jane Yolen's folk tale, Dream Weaver, states that "our myths, our crafted visions, our shaped dreams are a rehearsal of things to come." Isn't this the stuff that life is made of?

Yet, often our profession causes us to take on the role of Dream Catcher as we help people deal with the reality of life, the turbulent times, and/or the economic situations that often drive the job search. Dream Catchers have been identified as those that shut down ideas and innovations, in spite of the best intentions of helping (Russell, 1999). Sometimes we impose a dose of reality because of work setting structure, agency mission, time constraints or our own personal challenges and beliefs. At times, we, as members of this career development profession, have watched the trends, and interpreted the current labor market data, and while we sincerely want to help those who seek our assistance, we also work within the constraints of accessibility and our own job security.

Somewhere between the vision and immediate reality lies an undeniable quest. How do hope, meaning, spirituality, and reality flow together successfully? What are some of the barriers and challenges that we face personally and professionally? How can we take broken threads of the past and harsh realities of the present and weave them all into an inspiring vision of the future? How do we do this for ourselves as well as for our clients?

## Listen for the Dreams

*"Power to be career counselors resides in our souls and our spirits."*

-Richard Bolles

DreamWeavers encourage and empower individuals by helping them develop no matter how flawed the initial thought or concept may appear to be at first glance (Russell, 1999). DreamWeavers believe in the above quote by Richard Bolles because they experience that power and respect their experiences. They strive to listen to the core of the dream and want the best for themselves and for others, whatever that best may be. It means being able to understand the role of life planning, decision making and setting goals.

Sometimes it helps to step back and explore our dreams. Taking time to reflect on the past can enable us to understand our own patterns.

- What got you into this profession to begin with? What were your motivators/dreams?
- What steps did you take to translate your dreams into reality?

That initial dream of being a career development professional produced energy. That energy allowed us to balance school, family, work and a sporadic social life. It enabled us to get that degree, certificate or additional training even when we questioned the direction we were taking. It motivated us to seek the job that would allow us to work with the student, the adult, the retiree, the person we were trained to help. It gave us the ability to risk starting a business, promoting a program, joining a team or taking on a consulting contract. We were on our way.

And yes, we met challenges along the way. Often we were faced with the same challenges our clients face. Joanne Ciulla, author of *The Working Life,* subtitled her book, *The Promise and Betrayal of Modern Work.* She talks about the reasons that we work, the historical role of work in our lives and the challenges faced throughout the decades. She addresses all workers, regardless of their profession or their socio-economic status. Ciulla, a philosopher, poses excellent questions and ideas that fall between those of the social sciences and the humanities. Her critique of the world of work asks us to examine our belief systems and our behaviors. She invites us to recognize barriers for what they are, explore options, and develop effective decision-making skills.

## Address the Challenges

We face challenges daily in our profession. Some of those we can dismiss quite readily. Others have a tendency to linger or resurface year after year.

*Movement In The World of Work*

My early work experience was in the area of temporary employment. First as a temp, then as an account rep for a temporary firm and finally as the owner/operator of a temporary agency. Along the way I struggled with the definition and role of a contingent labor force. That was over 25 years ago and it is of interest to me that we still suspect any work trend that isn't the traditional permanent employment between employer and employee. Writers, economists and social psychologists have explored the role of the temporary worker, the just-in-time labor force, the "dejobbing" of America (Bridges, 1994). One of the latest has been the work of Daniel Pink, who researched and documented the flow of workers in *Free Agent Nation: The Future Of Working For Yourself* (2001). We may dismiss the entrepreneurial message without recognizing the societal trend and the overall movement it presents.

Often members of our own profession listen, react, and step back into expectation of the traditional mode of work, job searching and life planning—sometimes from fear for our own "employment contract," our lack of understanding of work outside of our realm, and sometimes from a lack of inertia. We listen to conference speakers and their innovative ideas, buy the books and review the concepts which we discuss among ourselves. And then they get lost in the rapid pace and immediate needs of turbulent times.

*Professional Identity*

We continue to struggle with titles and boundaries for the work that we do. We get caught in the struggle between being a DreamWeaver and helping individuals on a quest for meaning and fulfillment while meeting immediate needs that leave little room for dreams. Programs are created and ideas are presented only to have budgets slashed and promises dashed. We aren't sure where we are going which results in a confused message to the public. As we struggle with these issues, others come forward and provide services. One example is the continued debate between career coaching and career counseling. Another example is in the area of the aging workforce including pre-retirement planning. A review of current literature uncovers theories and practices from the human resource profession with little input from the field of career development. Additionally, financial planners have led the way in discussing retirement

topics with very little, if any, mention of career/life planning. It has only been in the last few years that career development professionals have addressed this population. We struggle to catch up and have lost opportunities to be leaders in the swell of retiring baby boomers.

*Leadership and Advocacy*

Strong professional identity can result in opportunities for leadership and advocacy for our profession as well as our clients. Strong professional unity can also result in recognition for the leadership that has been demonstrated regularly in our profession. A book by Malcolm Gladwell (2002) has the following message on the back cover: "The Tipping Point is that magic moment when an idea, trend, or social behavior crosses a threshold, tips, and spreads like wildfire." His theory, the Tipping Point, requires that we reframe how we think about the world. Career development has moved into career management and reshaped the idea of when career decisions are made. Twenty years ago we focused on mid-life career change as a new concept; now it is a common reality. There are many other career related themes that need the same kind of leadership and advocacy so that we can continue to have those magical moments. We can make a monumental difference.

*Collaboration*

It is only when we collaborate with others that we can begin to make a major difference. Those alliances enable us to listen to our dreams and those of others and to act on those dreams. We learn to respect the visionary abilities in each person and the DreamWeaving process can be embraced for an individual, for a profession and for a society. New structures of collaboration are born and reach across disciplines and across cultures.

## Honoring Our Connections

At the basis of this collaboration is the concept of honoring our connections. Honor comes from the heart and is demonstrated in multiple ways. It requires us to be genuine, focused and open to new ideas. It means that we support and nurture each other even when it doesn't fit our structure. It means that we take the time to actively listen to the dreams that guide us and that we allow others to do the same. We listen to the dreams of other disciples and invite them to join us in the reshaping of the world of work. Together we design innovative programs and practices that acknowledge multiple needs and multiple abilities. We use our professional connections wisely by honoring our differences and collaborating in ways yet undiscovered. We help each other understand the work that we do. We share in the risks and the benefits. Together we promote leadership and

serve as advocates to make a difference.

We celebrate the process by continuing to dream our dreams. We demonstrate our passion in ways that honor our profession. We stay engaged regardless of the world around us. We continue to be active listeners to the dreams of others. We demonstrate patience in allowing others their own process. We take steps to collaborate and address the challenges that confront us. We take care of ourselves so that we can continue to give to others. We honor our role as DreamWeavers.

*"Reach high, for stars lie hidden in your soul.*
*Dream deep, for every dream precedes the goal."*
Unknown

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